DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 737 CE 064 972

AUTHOR Horan, J. Michael
TITLE The Future of Unskilled Labor: Low Demand--Low Wage.
PUB DATE 15 Nov 93
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Education; *Articulation (Education); Educational Change; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Needs; *Futures (of Society); High Schools; *Integrated Curriculum; *Noncollege Bound Students; Skill Development; Skilled Workers; Technical Education; Technological Advancement; Two Year Colleges; Unskilled Workers; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Tech Prep

ABSTRACT

High school graduates who do not go on to higher education ("the forgotten half") can no longer expect to obtain steady employment at wages that can support a family. Their ability to compete for well-paying jobs is hampered by a lack of skilled training. In contrast, the labor market in the United States 50 years ago relied heavily on unskilled labor. Skilled workers are defined as those who are knowledgeable and competent in five areas: resources, interpersonal skills, information, systems, and technology. To prepare such workers, many changes are needed in the educational system. One change that could make a difference is tech prep, which combines high school and two-year technical college education. Tech prep is a true educational reform program gaining favor with many employers. Tech prep graduates often earn more than persons with four-year college degrees. This hands-on approach provides an opportunity for the "forgotten half" students; if it is more widely implemented, it will ensure a brighter future for many more young people. (Contains 12 references.) (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

CE

ED 363 737

THE FUTURE OF UNSKILLED LABOR: LOW DEMAND - LOW WAGE

BY

J. MICHAEL HORAN, ED.D.
DIRECTOR, MID FLORIDA
TECH PREP CONSORTIUM

CENTRAL FLORIDA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

OCALA, FLORIDA

NOVEMBER 15, 1993

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Michael Horan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 064 272

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The vision of economic success is fading quickly for many young Americans. Today's youth face formidable obstacles to their personal growth and development as they prepare for adult responsibilities. The litany of temptations that can derail ambition, self-determination and economic success are abundant: violence, illegal drugs, homelessness, teenage pregnancy, single parent guardians, meaningless high school diplomas, marginal work skills and low paying jobs.

We are at great risk of losing many of the current generation of our youth in much the same manner that we lost many in the previous generation. These floundering Americans, squeezed out of economic and career opportunities, are the product of an educational system that is long on content and short on substance. The problem according to Hull & Parnell (1991, p. 3) is that "too many students have been allowed to graduate from secondary and postsecondary programs without the competencies required to secure entry-level employment in a rapidly changing environment, or the flexibility to retrain later as job-market requirements change." These students are called the "Neglected Majority" and their numbers are estimated to be as high as 75 percent in most places (p. 12). Another author identifies this group as the "Forgotten Half" and estimates their numbers to be 20 million (W. T. Grant Foundation, 1988, p. 1). To the "Neglected Majority," education is seen not as the answer to problems - but as the cause!

The "Neglected Majority" of our youth have been allowed to go through high school taking "general education" courses. This path is an unfocused series of courses which do not teach job skills for post high school employment, and does not prepare them for college. Hull (1985, p. 38) describes this curriculum as a "combination of general, remedial, and personal/hobby courses." These students find education boring, irrelevant to their lives, frequently decide to "dropout," and learn to believe that education is a waste of time. Is it any surprise that neglected majority students are those most at risk of succumbing to the social temptations that jeopardize their spirit

and desire to succeed?

Neglected majority Americans are set up for failure and are unlikely to achieve a standard of living comparable to their predecessors. This group is unlikely to find the kind of work they desire, frequently settle for low wages, part-time jobs, and experience great difficulty supporting themselves and their families. A 1988 study by the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work (p. 3), entitled **The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America**, offered the following supporting economic data regarding the misfortunes of American youth.

* In 1986, young males ages 20-24 who had high school diplomas and had jobs earned 28 percent less in constant dollars than the comparable group of youth in 1973.

* High school dropouts ages 20-24 earned 42 percent less in 1986 in constant dollars than the same group in 1973.

* In 1984, 12 percent of all 20-24 year old males reported they had no earnings, up from 7.3 percent in 1973.

* In 1985, 43.7 percent of all young males ages 20-24 had incomes high enough to support a three-person family above the poverty level. This represents a decline from about 60 percent in 1973.

* In 1986, male high school graduates not in college and working full time was 49 percent. a decline from 73 percent in 1968. Full time working females was 42 percent, a decline from 57 percent in 1968.

* Of the 3.1 million family households headed by youth under age 25 in 1985, 30

percent had incomes below the poverty level, nearly double the rate of the early 1970s.

The ability of this generation to compete for good paying jobs is hampered considerably due to a lack of skilled training. This trend has occurred despite the decline in the number of persons aged sixteen to twenty-four, which otherwise would suggest a premium on their employment opportunities (Dornsife, 1992, p. 13).

In previous decades, the economic value of unskilled labor was considerable. High school graduates who were good with their hands, worked well with people, had a strong work ethic, and a positive attitude could find good paying jobs in business and industry. During the late 1950's, only 40 percent of all jobs required any technical training beyond high school (Business Council, 1990). The American job market placed high value on this vast pool of unskilled labor. American educators could readily meet the employment needs of the times.

However, since the economic heyday of the 1950's, the need for increased workplace skills by business and industry rose dramatically. Faced with the "globalization of commerce and industry and the explosive growth of technology on the job," our modern economy now requires a much higher level of technically trained employees to produce high-quality products (SCANS, 1991, p. xv). In the same vein, economists predict that by the year 2000 only 15 percent of all jobs in the United States will require unskilled labor (Business Council, 1990). American business has moved to higher ground to meet increasingly stiff global competition. Unfortunately, public education has been slow to meet the challenge of providing a better trained, technically literate employee for business and industry.

By and large, public education officials responded to the demands of a swiftly evolving business environment by maintaining a 1950's approach to curriculum development (Daggett, 1992). In most instances, secondary educators lowered academic standards, rather than raising them. The result has been a proliferation of

"general education" courses that neither train students for the workplace, nor prepare them for further study at the college level. The results of this academic stagnation produced a generation of unskilled young Americans. These high school graduates cannot compete for jobs that require advanced technical training and are at great risk of economic failure and social isolation. By the year 2000, if not so already, these unskilled individuals will be structurally unemployable in the United States (Crossroads for America, 1987).

In earlier years, Neglected Majority Americans who could not find work had the option of joining the military, a common pathway to advancement for millions of men and women. Sadly, the military is no longer a viable option for most "unskilled" Americans. The military is very particular about who is allowed to serve the country. Only our brightest and most skilled youth will have a realistic opportunity to join the volunteer armed forces. The demise of the "Cold War" and defense downsizing are further narrowing this traditional training option.

U. S. global competitiveness can be restored by rethinking how we train our citizens for high-tech employment. The SCANS Report for America 2000 (1991, p. xvii) outlines five basic competencies that all workers should bring to the workplace. These competencies span the chasm between school and the workplace and support the development of specific technical knowledge. Skilled workers are knowledgeable in these areas and can productively use:

1. RESOURCES: allocating time, money, materials, space and staff.

2. INTERPERSONAL SKILLS: working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

3. INFORMATION: acquiring and evaluating data, organizing and maintaining files, interpreting and communicating, and using computers to process information.

4. SYSTEMS: understanding social, organizational, and technological systems,

monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems.

5. TECHNOLOGY: selecting equipment and tools, applying technology to specific tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies.

However, far greater changes must occur in our educational systems if we are to meet the needs of our modern global economy. Hull and Parnell (1991, p. xxi) recommend that "future professional technicians should be enrolled in a Tech Prep/Associate Degree program that provides them advanced skills through studies and experiences in applied academics, skills and advanced technology. Tech Prep, they contend "is neither a new brand of academicism nor a new style of vocationalism, but a fusion of the two" (p. 9).

Tech Prep builds on the systemic changes already occurring in the workplace. Most of the jobs in the 20 fastest-growing occupations in the United States do not require a college baccalaureate degree for entry (Parnell, 1990). Employers in these fields require additional postsecondary education and the Associate in Science degree offered by community and junior colleges is favored by these persons. According to Dornsife (1992, p. 14), "the most rapid rate of job growth is among technician jobs that require training at the postsecondary level."

Recent comparisons of "quarterly earnings" between Florida high school, community college, and university graduates reflect the value placed on technical training in traditional vocational education programs by business and industry. Associate of Science degree holders, on average, earned over $1300 more than a person with a four-year college degree. Postsecondary Vocational Certificate completers earned slightly more than persons with a four-year college degree (FETPIP, 1992). (Refer to Appendix A). It is clear, at least for Florida employers, that they need and value the technical training offered at the Community and Junior College level.

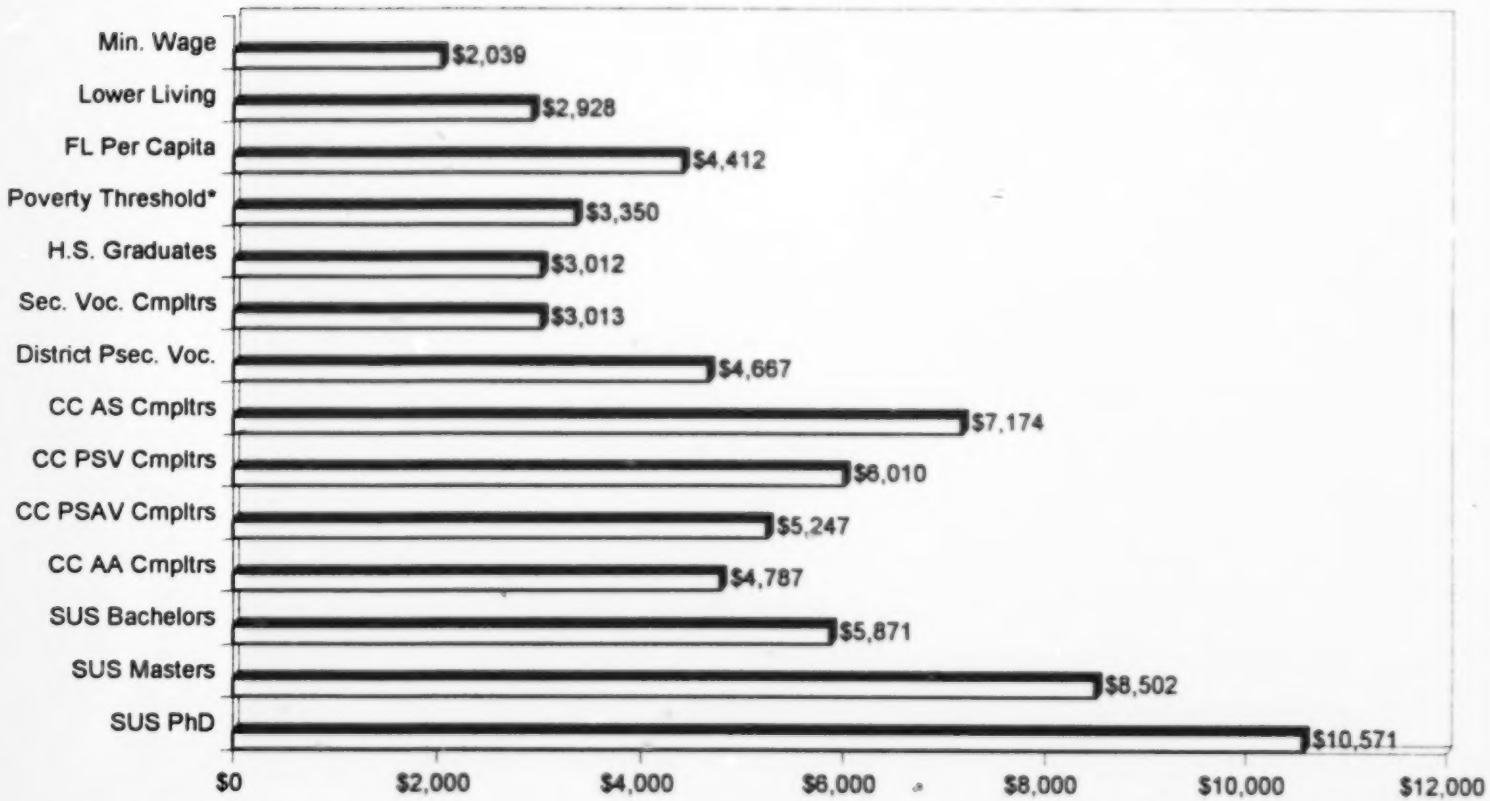
Tech Prep is a true educational reform program gaining favor with many of our

national, state and local leaders and is being developed throughout the United States. Tech Prep, short for technical preparation, addresses the needs of business and industry by developing a structured, "hands on," "real world" approach to teaching technical skills needed to compete for higher paying jobs. Tech Prep also infuses critical thinking, problem-solving, team work, and life-long learning concepts along with core technical skill development. This program provides an opportunity for technical skill development for unskilled "Neglected Majority" students. It is also the only national education initiative that offers major hope of reversing years of neglect to the majority of American children.

The future for unskilled labor in the United States is clear: low demand - low wage. By the year 2000, unskilled workers will be living on the fringes of society with little prospect of employment beyond manual, service industry work. Tech Prep students, on the other hand, will be prepared to compete for the better paying jobs in growing high-demand technology-based fields. This innovative education program will be their passport to a bright future!

Appendix A

Florida Quarterly Earnings "Gauges" 1992 Employment 1991-92 Students



*Family of Four
Florida Employment Training and Placement Information Program

CITED REFERENCES

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, Industrial Union Department. (1987). Crossroads for America. Washington, D. C. In Daggett, W. R. (1992). Teacher Guide - High School Awareness Program. Schenectady, New York: International Center for Leadership in Education.

Business Council of New York State. (1990). Schools for the Future. A Working Paper for the 1990 Business/labor Education Symposium. New York. In Daggett, W. R. (1992). Teacher Guide -High School Awareness Program. Schenectady, New York: International Center for Leadership in Education.

Daggett, W. R. (1992). Teacher Guide - High School Awareness Program. Schenectady, New York: International Center for Leadership in Education.

Dornsife, C. (1992). Beyond Articulation: The Development of Tech prep Programs. Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program. (1992). Quarterly Earnings "Gauges" 1992 Employment. Tallahassee, Florida: Department of Education.

Hull, D. & Parnell, D. (1991). Tech Prep Associate Degree - A Win/Win Experience. Waco, Texas: Center for Occupational Research and Development.

Parnell, D. (1990). Why Applied Academics. The Balance Sheet, Fall: South-Western Publishing Company.

Parnell, D. (1985). The Neglected Majority. Washington, D. C.: The Community College Press.

U. S. Department of Labor. (1991). What Work Requires of Schools - A SCANS Report for America 2000. Washington, D. C.: The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills.

William T. Grant Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship. (1988). The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America. Washington, D.C.